

# KAZAKHSTAN REPORT

January 10, 2005

Dear family, brethren and friends,

Ramash and I want to wish you all a happy and peaceful 2005.

We were delighted with the long awaited arrival of our Esfir Joan on December 15th last. Doctors had been setting and re-setting and tweaking the dates for a full SIX weeks before the birth (of course no one is going to convince me otherwise after our experiences with hospitals here that Tarot cards and "casting bones" are not a part of the training!). But we have been blessed well beyond what we deserve with a beautiful little daughter; healthy and loud. By the way for those of you who have been asking, Esfir is the Russian equivalent of Esther (our star). And Ruth has been remarkably tender with the new arrival, kissing her gently and stroking her hand. I'm sure that will change with time.

The Lord's Church:

We were a little surprised recently when Alma Auesova phoned us and asked could she come over. We had spoken to her on several occasions, trying to persuade her to think again about spiritual matters, and we had thought that she was no longer interested. We took the opportunity to talk with her and invited her to our home, and despite the plunging temperatures that night (it was -14C / 7F), and getting lost on the bus, she came and we talked for 3 or 4 hours with Alma. She told us that she was willing to try again to live as a Christian and assured us that she would be a worship on January 2nd. But she has failed to realize on her promises; there may be some family and personal problems hindering her right now. Please pray for Alma, that she will find her way back to the Lord.

Of course we are delighted to have Charles, Kay and Kim back with us after their travels in the States. Everyone was excited to see them again at Worship yesterday. However, our attendances for the month of December were good, considering. We averaged 10 each Lord's Day and 8 for our mid-week class.

The brethren here continue to do well and are always thankful to hear from "foreign" brothers and sisters. Please continue to pray for them.

Bible Studies and Contacts:

With Jumabai's conversion recently, we have decided to start a Bible study in his home to help encourage him and teach him and others the gospel. He lives 80miles out of town on a small farm, not too far from Kazakhstan's, Grand Canyon, Charyin. Our first class was last Friday (Jan.7th) when Konisbai, Gaziz and his uncle Nurserik (Gulmira's younger brother) traveled the 2 hours there through dense fog and icy roads. Jumabai has been a believer for a long time, and has influenced his children and their spouses for Christianity and so altogether there were 14 souls presents during the class, including 7 adults. We answered some basic questions of theirs about tithing and miraculous gifts before we began our study in the gospel of John. If the Lord allows, we will travel there fortnightly and study through John's gospel.

I am hoping to begin again our class for the teenagers. There is still a need for them to get together and learn from the Bible in an environment that is not dominated by "adults."

Personal and Family:

We are truly thankful to the Lord for the safe birth of our Esfir. And when we saw the level of medical care that is given in this country's most prestigious maternity hospital, we were all the more thankful that mother and daughter made it out of there intact!

It does seem to me that with one extra baby at home now that the workload has increased 8-fold. Is that normally the case? It is amazing to see how little people can "tag-team" for your attention at three in the morning! But we are so happy that we wouldn't have it any other way (or maybe we're just too tired to notice there is a difference).

Once in a while I'll write about Kazakh peculiarities. Well, one that I have noticed since I started driving here is the number of police checkpoints. In the past two months I have been stopped more times than in 10 years of driving in Ireland! There are stops to insure that documents are in order; stops to insure the vehicle is road-worthy; and stops to insure you are not traveling too fast. And there are what may be considered "social" stops. Yesterday morning, on the way to worship was one such stop. I was given the "magic wand" and the lieutenant promptly asked "how was your New Year celebrations??"

I replied, "Fine thanks, and how was yours?"

And he answered, "Pretty quiet. Thanks. You and go now." And all this occurred without showing any documents or bribes!

Now with all this police activity, do not be fooled into thinking that Almaty is a safe place to drive. The kill-rate on the roads here for last year was 12 times the Irish average and 7 times the American average, despite having more police officers patrolling.

A Review of the Year:

At the end of the past couple of years I have included a brief summary of what I considered to be the main developments during that year.

2004 has been another interesting year for us. The work here is excruciatingly slow at times and discouragements seem to be felt deeper because of it. We began the year with 8 Christians in the congregation and our attendances averaging 10 each Lord's Day. But Gulya's desertion in July to the world was felt by us all as a blow... she is a vivacious character. Assemblies have been a little quieter since she left us, somehow confusing the Lord's church with an American visa. We have had less visitors in 2004 than the previous year (altogether 16 individuals), but most of them return on at least one subsequent occasion. And for the most part our visitor are all either family members or close acquaintances of the Christians, so there may still be future contact with them.

We were all greatly encouraged by the visit of our brother and sisters from Russia in August and by John & Sarah Dryden and their son John Sergei, in September. Everyone was buoyed up by these visits and the brethren here especially appreciated being able to talk to Russian speaking Christians (without the barrier of and interpreter). Of course the highlights for us all have been the baptisms of Gaziz and his grandfather Jumabai in November.

So how does the work here look for the next twelve months? One thing we already know now is that we will lose Kim Ottwell some time in late spring when she will take a new assignment elsewhere with the US State Department. Hopefully we will be able to find Alma Auesova again and encourage her further to repent. And with our new classes starting in the town of Chillik, where Jumabai lives, there will be opportunities to teach others there about the Lord. The brethren here are continuing to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, and are showing themselves to be faithful servants of His.

Ramash and I want to thank everyone for all the ways you have helped and supported us throughout the past year. We are deeply indebted to so many of you for your financial help, especially in the purchase of our home here in Almaty. And we are aware of the sacrifices of so many of you in order to support us in the preaching of the gospel here in Kazakhstan. We would like you all to know that while it is humbling, it is so much more heartening for us to be recipients of so many blessings from far and near. We both also want to wish every one of you and your families, a Happy New Year, and our prayer for you is that the Lord may bless you with all that you need and strengthen you in your desire to serve Him.

May God bless you all,

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